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SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE THIRD
SESSION OF THE 22ND LEGISLATURE OF
THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA ON
THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 1991.

THE HONOURABLE GORDON TOWERS
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR, PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly:

On this first occasion on which I am privileged to represent Her Majesty at the opening of this assembly, it gives me great pleasure to have the honor to welcome you to the Third Session of the Twenty-second Legislature of the Province of Alberta.

I, first of all, wish to take this opportunity, on behalf of all Albertans, to pay tribute to my predecessor, the Honourable Helen Hunley, who as Her Majesty's representative, so diligently and conscientiously carried out the duties of this office for the past six years.

I would also like, on behalf of my government and all Albertans, to express my sincere gratitude to those Albertans who served with the Coalition Forces in the recent conflict in the Persian Gulf. Their bravery, and that of their families, make us proud; I am thankful for their safe return.

We live in interesting times; everywhere we are surrounded by change. As we begin this session, my government recognizes these changes pose immense challenges for Albertans and Canadians as we approach the beginning of a new century.

In facing these challenges -- in finding solutions that will allow us to continue to prosper as a province and a people -- my government and Albertans must communicate and cooperate better than ever before. Albertans, through our province's strong, democratic traditions, have made this Assembly the instrument through which their common desires and values are developed into policies that shape the future of our province.

In developing these policies, the key to my government's role is balance. My government must provide stability amidst this world of change; it must instill confidence in Alberta's future. I now outline the directions my government will take.

The Fiscal Challenge

The fiscal challenge facing my government and all Albertans -- those of maintaining the services my government provides while exercising fiscal restraint -- are extremely difficult ones. Reduced federal government support ... inflationary pressures ... increased demand on services ... and fluctuating commodity prices all influence Alberta's fiscal position.

It is widely accepted that my government's record with respect to controlling program spending is the best in Canada. In addition, because of my government's careful fiscal management, hundreds of thousands of Albertans enjoy the lowest taxes in Canada. My government cares about all Albertans. Fiscal responsibility is not a blind obsession -- fiscal responsibility helps our people and allows us to provide special help to those who really need it.

The fiscal challenges for governments grow more difficult every day, but striving to balance the budget remains a priority. Budgets, however, are not just balance sheets. Budgets are also about school children, the sick, the handicapped, people, families. My government will ensure that those basic services -- health, education, social services, seniors programs and protection of the environment -- are maintained to ensure the high quality of life Albertans enjoy.

Except for Alberta, Canada is in the midst of a recession, and many Canadians are enduring economic hardships. Through the efforts of Albertans and my government's fiscal and diversification policies, Alberta will continue to grow in spite of the recession around us. It is widely recognized that Alberta's economy will continue to be the most vibrant in Canada, and indeed North America. Alberta's unemployment rate is the lowest in our country as my government's plan, working in partnership with our people, is meeting its objectives.

Albertans should be proud that their planning, work-ethic and individual initiative have made our province a beacon of financial strength in North America.

The Economic Challenge

The economic challenges facing Alberta are considerable. An increasingly competitive marketplace ... technological change ... and protectionist trade practices both within and outside of Canada are a few of the challenges business and my government must face together in developing an economy that will continue to prosper into the next century.

My government will work with business, labour and community leaders in order to ensure that our plan for Alberta's economic future continues to be successful and able to meet the changing conditions.

My government will assist business to find other solutions as well. For our traditional industries -- agriculture and energy -- and for our new industries -- forestry, technology, tourism, and petrochemicals -- my government will continue to aggressively pursue new markets ... reduce interprovincial and international barriers to trade ... seek new investment ... apply new technologies ... and provide a climate in which business can be successful. At the same time, the initiative of individual Albertans should not be -- and will not be -- restricted or overregulated.

Alberta's economic strength depends on the prosperity of every region of our province, and my government is committed to ensuring that both urban and rural Alberta are given the opportunity for growth. By working with farmers and the federal government to provide income stability for agriculture ... assisting small businesses and exporters in getting their start ... encouraging continued specialization and diversification throughout the province ... continuing to improve our transportation system ... and encouraging rural business development, my government will be part of the solution to our economic challenges.

Alberta's economic prosperity also depends on the quality of our work force. My government will work with business, labour and industry to develop new labour market strategies; enhance our education, training and certification programs; encourage research and development; and continue to improve workplace health and safety.

My government also recognizes the importance our international relations hold with respect to the prosperity of our province. My government will enhance its international efforts through our offices, trade missions, and our special relationships with provinces and states in other countries. My government will also pursue closer economic ties with the Pacific Northwest Economic Region.

In the important area of international trade policy, my government will work closely with Alberta business, other provinces and the federal government to ensure that Alberta's interests are addressed in the Canada-U.S.-Mexico and General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade negotiations. The success of the GATT negotiations are vital to the future of agriculture in Alberta. My government strongly supports fair and liberalized trade throughout North America and the world.

Encouraged by my government, Alberta's entrepreneurs and dedicated work force have built a strong and diversified economy that will continue to prosper amidst the changes we face.

The Environmental Challenge

The environmental challenges facing Alberta, Canada and the world are very complex. Balancing economic development and environmental protection ... maintaining our quality of life and the quality of our environment ... and accepting our role as part of a global environment -- these are issues facing our province in the nineties. Albertans, Alberta industry, and my government have worked

together to achieve great success in the past, and we must be steadfast in our commitment to find solutions for the future.

My government will introduce strong environmental protection legislation; draft waste management legislation; create clean-air and fuel efficiency programs; and examine all major economic initiatives. Albertans throughout the province will be consulted and involved in deciding our environmental future.

My government also is committed to helping individuals become more active in protecting their environment. Through our waste management and recycling programs, the development and use of environmentally-friendly products, and environmental workshops for teachers, students and the general public, my government will encourage greater awareness and understanding of the role individual Albertans have to play in protecting our province. Together, Albertans and my government must demonstrate a clear and strong commitment to protect our magnificent province for the present and future well-being of all Albertans.

The Social Challenge

Working with Albertans, my government will remain committed to meeting the social needs of Albertans. Our aging population ... the changing nature of families ... and limited resources all contribute to this challenge.

Enabling Albertans to improve the quality of life through better health -- and providing Albertans with equal opportunity to attain and maintain good health -- continues to be a goal of my government. In addressing this priority, my government will focus on managing health resources more effectively and efficiently to ensure that our system remains affordable and sustainable. In providing prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and support services, my government will continue to develop an Acute Care Funding Plan, establish an Alberta Family Life and Drug Abuse Foundation, and respond further to the

recommendations of the Premier's Commission on Future Health Care for Albertans.

Alberta's social strength is more than the health of Albertans. In addressing the social challenges we face, my government must work with Albertans to strengthen the family ... bolster volunteers ... care for our seniors ... prevent violence in and out of the home ... provide for recreational and cultural opportunities ... encourage independence and dignity for all Albertans ... and allow for the full expression of our ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. "Stability" and "choice" and "freedom" are the foundation of society in Alberta, and my government will continue in its efforts to keep the foundation strong.

Education will continue to be a top priority for my government. The greatest cause we can have is to prepare young Albertans for the challenges they will face as adults. My government will assist Albertans in helping our children prepare by developing a new vision for education ... continuing to provide equal opportunities for students throughout the province ... and by introducing tuition policies that reflect the evolving needs of our advanced education system.

The Constitutional Challenge

The constitutional challenges -- those of deciding what Alberta's future in Canada will be -- are as important as any my government and Albertans face. Nowhere is the cooperation, commitment and consensus of Albertans more required than on this issue; the future of our province and Canada is at stake. The issues: language, our political institutions, the division of responsibilities, our fundamental rights and freedoms, the future of our aboriginal peoples, and the very nature of our federal system are more compelling now than they have ever been. Canada has changed, and Albertans will have to decide what Alberta in a new Canada will be.

My government has already begun the task of seeking the views of Albertans on the key constitutional questions facing the province and the country.

My government has sought to encourage dialogue through the release of a discussion paper entitled "Alberta in a New Canada". It is my government's intention to establish a Select Special Committee of the Legislature to conduct public hearings on our constitutional future. Through the work of the Select Committee, my government will ensure that Albertans have full opportunity to participate directly in determining our province's future.

My government's responsibility is to use the instruments of democracy Albertans have entrusted to us to develop a plan to address the challenges I have outlined today. My government has that plan to provide for stability amidst change.

In addition, during this Session, my government will:

- Establish a Conference on the Economy to review and renew our economic plan for the next decade;
- Re-introduce the Loans and Trust Company Act;
- Introduce a new Municipal Government Act;
- Introduce legislation to promote local self-government in improvement districts throughout Alberta;
- Participate in the North American Waterfowl Plan;
- Continue to negotiate Treaty land entitlement claims;
- Establish the Foundations for Adult Learning and Development Policy;
- Implement a number of recommendations of the Action Plan of the Premiers' Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities;
- Establish a single agency to provide for the granting of lottery funds to the arts;
- Amend the school act to recognize minority language education rights;
- Amend the Legislative Assembly Act to include certain recommendations from the Conflict of Interest Review Panel report -- an Ethics Commissioner will be established; and

- Introduce other legislation programs and fiscal measures for consideration and deliberation in this House.

There are many jobs left to do. My government's cause is to make a difference in a different and changing world. My government cares about the well-being of our free society, and for this beautiful land we share. The land has shaped Albertans and been shaped by Albertans. The prairies, the foothills, the forests, streams and lakes have shaped a people of freedom, independence and pride; a people with beliefs and values that mean greatness for Alberta, and opportunity and dignity for each and every Albertan.

In due course you will be presented with budget estimates. You will be asked to authorize the necessary funds for operating services and expenditures, and to endorse a program of capital financing for the Government of Alberta. You represent a beautiful province of strength, hope and promise.

And now I leave you to the business of this Session, confident that as elected representatives you will in every way fulfill your responsibilities to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly:

I pray that the blessing of God may rest upon your deliberations.

God Bless Alberta.
God Save the Queen.